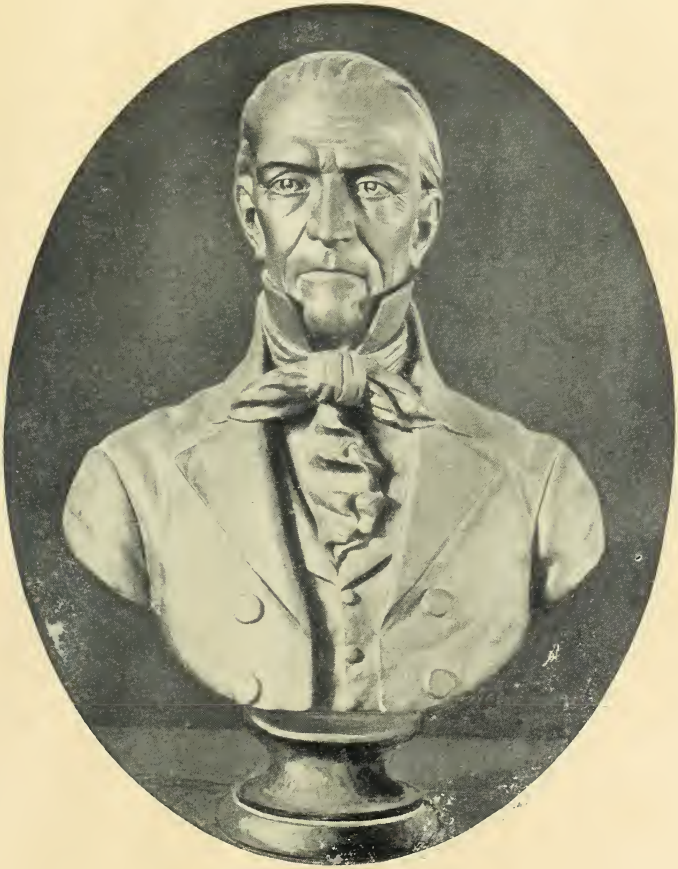
A Unique School

James T. Edwards, D. D., LL. D.

PORTRAIT OF JOHN McDONOGH.

(From the Miniature.)



BUST OF JOHN McDONOGH.

(By Repetto.)

A Unique School

Address before the University Convocation at Albany, N. Y., June 28, 1895, by

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Republished from

"Proceedings of the University Convocation."

McDonogh, Md.
Printed by Boys of the School
June, 1903

Digitized by the Internet Archive
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https://archive.org/details/uniqueschool01edwa

A Unique School.

The Committee who prepared the programme has invited me to describe an institution which it thought might be of some interest to the Convocation because of its unique character. As it is well endowed, and in no sense dependent upon patronage for support, it will be seen that the only motive for presenting this paper is to sketch some of the distinguishing features of a school which may be regarded as *sui generis.*

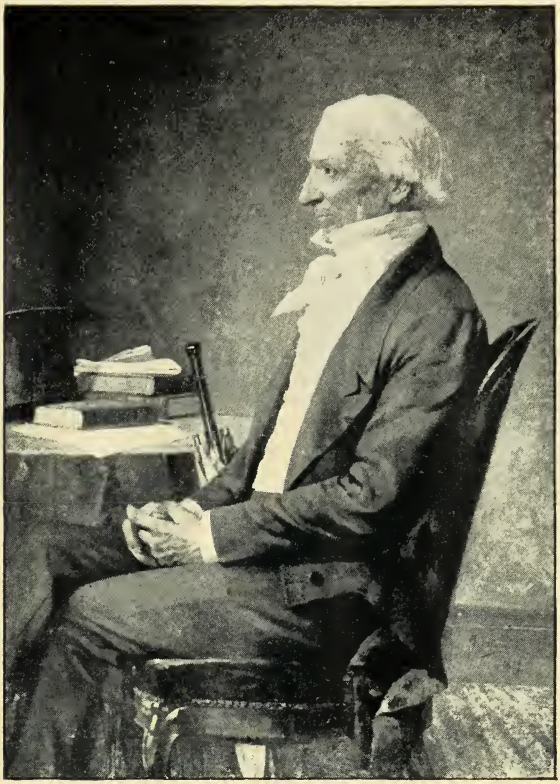
Individuality, whether we regard the scholar or the school, is a precious thing. Of late we have heard so much concerning unification of courses of instruction that it is possible we may be led somewhat to undervalue that individualism in education which carefully regards the necessities of time and place and respects the personality of pupils, teachers, and schools. An organism, especially an intellectual organism, should be permitted large freedom of development. Any system which aims to manage human beings by Procrustean methods will result either in loss to its victims or in the destruction of the giant's bedstead. There is no better sign of the vitality and value of American schools than that they possess considerable individuality and are not slavish imitations of those of the old world.

Eight miles from the northwest limit of Baltimore is an institution known as the McDonogh Farm School. It is situ-

ated on one of the fine old estates which since colonial times have constituted an interesting feature of this part of Maryland. Rapid transit and the demand for suburban homes have already divided many of these aristocratic holdings, with their noble parks and waving lines of hill and valley, but not a few of them remain as they were. Among these is the plantation formerly belonging to General Mordecai Gist of Revolutionary fame, which now constitutes a large portion of the McDonogh farm, and formerly bore the name "Prospect Hill."

This school was founded by John McDonogh, who died in New Orleans forty-five years ago. Born a poor boy in Baltimore, he went to Louisiana shortly after reaching his majority, and began life there at an important epoch in our history. France was just transferring to the United States the vast territory beyond the Mississippi. Mr. McDonogh prospered, and became one of the largest landholders in the world.

The school grounds embrace eight hundred and thirty-five acres, an area of about one square mile and a quarter. Three hundred acres of this land are forest, containing among others many nut-bearing trees, which, with grapes in the thickets and berries on the borders, make a paradise for birds, squirrels, and boys. Clear, cold brooks run through and along the sides of the estate. The soil is fertile, and the farm yielded last year two thousand bushels of wheat and about the same quantity of corn. The garden, vineyard, and orchards supply an abundance of fruit. Situated near the centre of the farm are the school buildings, which cost two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.



JOHN M'DONOGH.

McDONOGH SCHOOL, McDONOGH, MARYLAND, FROM THE FARM GATE.

Tradition says that his early manhood was not untinged with romance; but the pride of a Spanish beauty in one case, and differences of religious faith in another, condemned him to a solitary existence, which found its greatest solace in cherishing two noble schemes of beneficence—one, the liberation and colonization of his many slaves, for which he prepared them by giving them an opportunity to earn their freedom through their own industry and faithfulness; the other was the accumulation of a vast fortune which should be devoted to education.

His views concerning education were farsighted and statesmanlike. As early as 1838 he wrote: "It will be permitted me to observe that I am and have long been convinced that the first most imperative and sacred duty which every government is bound to perform, and which rulers and legislatures cannot avoid the performance of but under the heaviest responsibility to heaven, is that of providing by law for the education of every child within the limits of their respective governments. To that end parents and guardians of youth should be made, under heavy penalties, to send their children to schools supported under a system of general taxation at the sole expense of the government. I will add that the first and principal object I have at heart, the object that has actuated and filled my soul from early boyhood with a desire to acquire fortune, is that every poor child may receive a common English education."

At his death he left his property to be divided equally between Baltimore and New Orleans, to be forever sacredly set apart for the purposes of education. The utilization of these funds was long delayed by litigation and the exigencies of the civil war. About twenty years ago all questions in dispute were

settled, and each city obtained its portion, amounting to about seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The Baltimore school has since received from other sources about two hundred and fifty thousand more, and its present property aggregates one million and a quarter dollars. John McDonogh was the second man in this country to give for the promotion of education so large a sum as one million and a half dollars. Stephen Girard was the first. The list of philanthropists who have given an equal or larger amount does not yet comprise a score of names.

Mr. McDonogh loved children, and always had under his care children whom he was educating. With pathetic simplicity, he closes his will by saying: "I was near forgetting that I have still one small request to make, one little favor to ask, and it shall be the last. It is that it may be permitted annually to the children of the schools to plant and water a few flowers around my grave." This request is never neglected. New Orleans devoted a large part of its portion of the estate to the erection and equipment of thirty school buildings, and the city meets by taxation the expense of instruction. They constitute the most interesting feature of the city's system of education. All these schools bear the name of their founder. No other name it so familiar to the youth of the Crescent City as that of John McDonogh.

The McDonogh School of Baltimore has sought to embody in its work the fundamental ideas concerning education which were freely set forth by the founder in his will and in his letter to the executors.

PRINCIPAL'S HOUSE. MAIN BUILDING. BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF FARM — LOOKING NORTHEAST.

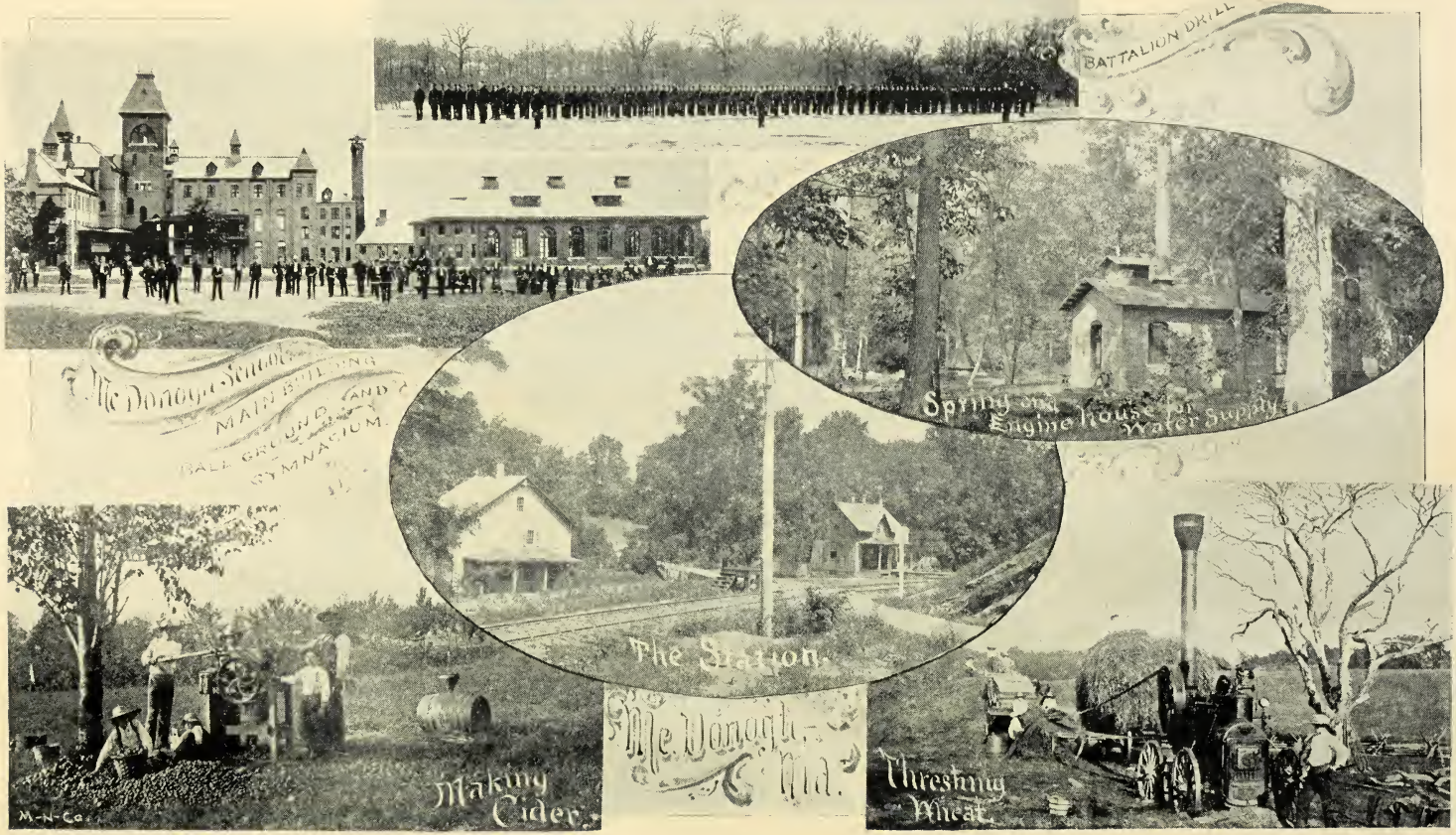
He desired that it should be a "farm school," and directed that there should be purchased several hundred acres of land near Baltimore. According to his view, the boys in attendance, while securing a substantial English education, should also become familiar with the varied work of a farm, including the implements used, the products raised, and the natural objects of field and forest. This knowledge, he believed, would help to make them intelligent, sensible men, whether they should become practical farmers or not. They were to be trained in the class rooms with the distinct understanding that each youth would probably be dependent upon his own exertions for livelihood and advancement. They must therefore be taught to be thorough in their work, capable of clear, independent thinking, and able to use the knowledge they secure with precision and promptness. Particular attention was to be paid to music, that it might furnish delight and inspiration both during the school period and in after life. It was one of his strongest desires that God be reverenced and worshipped, and his counsel sought by the daily reading of his word. Order, obedience, truthfulness, honesty, industry, kindness, and good manners were to be constantly inculcated. These are a few of the precepts which he advocated. It may be truthfully claimed that these ideas have been woven into the warp and woof of this school. We will note some of its characteristics.

Let it be premised in this connection that education in its broadest sense includes all influences which affect character from the cradle to the grave. "I am," said the wise Ulysses, "a part of all that I have met," and Byron wrote:

> I become a portion of that around me,
> And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
> Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

For a city boy to spend four or five years at McDonogh, and merely become familiar with the place — its trees, flowers, fruit, animals, utensils, operations, and farm products—is to make the world ever after more interesting and valuable to him. Such familiarity with natural objects tends to develop good sense and a practical availability which a boy will never lose. This places him at the beginning of life in proper relation to *things*. Often, too, it means robust health, and health is power.

There are one hundred and fifty boys at McDonogh. For nine months of the year all the pupils spend seven hours a day in study or recitation. To read, speak, and write our native tongue correctly is faithfully enjoined upon all. Each boy must acquire the art of numbers, and learn to manipulate skilfully nine digits and a cipher. Each may gain a good knowledge of geography, physics, chemistry, botany, physiology, biology, book-keeping, English and American history, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, land surveying, German, French, and occasionally some other branches. Then comes the manual labor department. Some boys are printers, and others work in the shops as carpenters, wood carvers, turners or moulders; some are surveyors, type writers, stenographers, draughtsmen, farmers, gardeners, bee keepers, broom makers or jobbers; for an hour and a half each day all do some work which employs the hand as well as the head. All are trained by military drill, and are thereby taught to be, like soldiers,


BATTALION DRILL
The Donogh Schools
MAIN BUILDING AND A
BALL GROUND AND A
GYMNASIUM.
Spring and Engine House for Water Supply
The Station.
The Donogh, Md.
Making Cider.
Threshing Wheat.
M-N-Co.

prompt, obedient, neat, orderly, active, erect, and manly. Music is a distinct and popular feature of the school. While there is an entire absence of sectarian teaching or bias, an earnest effort is made to incline all pupils to acquire just ideas of God, and form a high purpose to live worthily in accordance with the requirements of the Bible and the dictates of an enlightened conscience. The conditions of admission to the school are as follows:

The candidates must be poor boys, of good character, between the ages of ten and fourteen, sound in body and mind, of respectable associations in life, residents of Baltimore, and successful in passing a competitive examination.

The terms of the founder's will gave Baltimore boys the preference so long as that city should furnish a sufficient number of candidates to fill all vacancies; after that, competition might be thrown open to other seaboard cities. As there are now five applicants for every vacancy, this latter provision is not likely to become of practical value to other cities.

The boys remain until they are sixteen years of age if their progress and conduct are satisfactory. By superiority of scholarship and excellence of deportment they may obtain the privilege of remaining another year. Once admitted to the school, all their expenses for clothing, tuition, and care are paid by the institution.

Care is taken that this generosity shall be entirely free from any conditions that would produce a humiliating sense of dependence or otherwise interfere with manly spirit. The boys are made to feel that they have as good a right to accept, gratefully but self-respectingly, the bounty of John McDonogh, as

have the readers of the Astor library to avail themselves of the liberality of Mr. Astor, or the students of Cornell the gifts of its founder.

Frequent requests have been made from various parts of the country for permission to enter pay students, but it has not been deemed advisable to introduce such an innovation.

Perhaps the history of a day will best give a clear conception of the busy, wholesome, happy life of this little community.

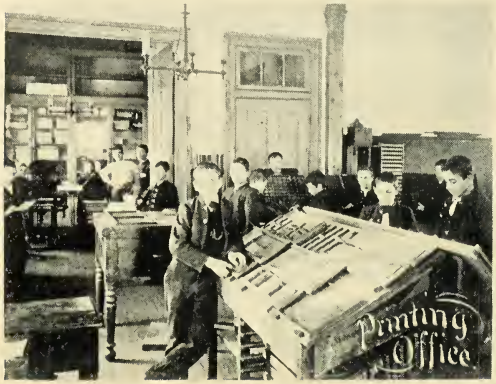
It is half-past five in the morning. In the several dormitories one hundred and fifty boys are sleeping the sound sleep of youth and health. A moment later an alarm clock warns the boy who has the "wake-up job" to disturb their slumbers, and immediately a bell strikes. In five minutes all must be up and dressed. At the end of that time, the lad who is "officer of the day" inspects the occupant of each room, who then proceeds to put his quarters in such order that they shall be acceptable to the matron and her assistants. A visit to the lavatories follows, for the purpose of washing and blacking of shoes. Busy squads then set about various tasks, such as bringing milk and butter from the dairy, winding the gas machines, and making out the report for the weather bureau, while those who have no other duties to perform are engaged in reading, study, or drawing in the school room, or in play, until the chapel bell rings at 6.30. Then for fifteen minutes one of the teachers gives the school a digest of the news of the day; this is followed by the devotional service, consisting of singing, alternate Scripture reading, and prayer.

Breakfast at seven. Each meal is preceded by inspection in ranks by officers of companies. Two officers supervise each

Chemical Laboratory.

Reception Room.

Reading Room.


Printing Office

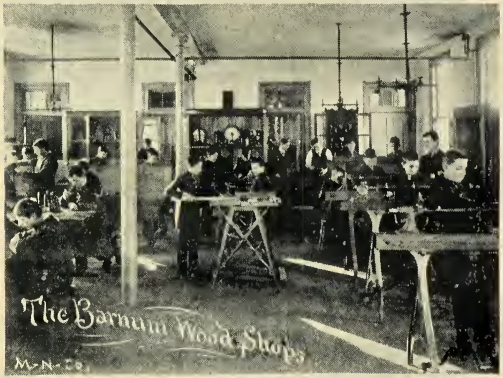

The Barnum Wood Shops
M-N-Co.

table. Many of the minor positions of trust are filled by the boys, and great reliance is placed upon the public sentiment of the school to regulate a vast number of details which concern the good order and honorable dealing of the boys. For example, it would be impossible for a dishonest, untruthful, unchaste lad, or one who cheats in recitation, to remain in the school. His life would be made intolerable by his companions. One of the "old boys," who now holds a position of great responsibility, has said, "The boys themselves will not permit anything to interfere with the fresh candor of this useful life."

The hours from eight to one are devoted to study and recitation. Dinner at half-past one. From half-past two to four all are engaged in the shops, offices, or fields. Here is a squad surveying a route for an imaginary railroad or measuring a field, there two rival companies are husking corn; the printers are setting up *The Week*, a paper which chronicles the transactions of the passing days and every month faithfully records the standing of each pupil.

Abundant time is given for play and military exercises. Supper at half-past six, and from seven to nine preparation of the lessons for the following day. Eight hours of refreshing sleep succeed. Saturday afternoon is usually a half-holiday.

During June, July, and August there are no classes. This is the time when the boys become most familiar with the work of the farm. The long days also afford ample time for games, bathing, and rambling over the large estate. Many a lesson concerning its fauna and flora is acquired. Habits of observation are formed, sense perception is cultivated, and nature studied at first hand. Possibly through such experiences

a boy is inspired to do something of unusual merit in the study of natural science. The pupils have gathered and classified fifteen hundred specimens of plants, making one of the most complete collections in the State, and the meteorological observations are kept with commendable accuracy.

Manual training at McDonogh is employed more as a means than as an end, more for the purpose of securing mental and moral discipline than for teaching the trades; yet not a few acquire here a knowledge and skill which become available as a means of livelihood. Many a good civil engineer, architect, carpenter, printer, or machinist here builds the foundation for a substantial superstructure. Educators have begun to realize justly how close a relation doing bears to learning.

Symmetrical culture cannot be secured without the specific training of the senses and physical powers. Say what you will about the splendors of intellect, there is something almost grotesque in an education which neglects to correlate and perfect that physical organization which is at the same time an essential means to mental development and the mightiest agent for the execution of the soul's requirements. No wonder that this topic has become one of the most interesting subjects of discussion at the great gatherings of educators.

A few other features of this school remain to be described. The length of a boy's vacation in summer and at the holidays varies from four to twelve days, and depends upon his scholarship record. Each school session includes one Visitors' Day, when all friends of the boys are welcomed.

The discipline of the institution aims to secure its end by the co-operation of the boys. Punishments consist largely in

GYMNASIUM AND MUSEUM.

the withdrawal of privileges and loss of the respect of teachers and school fellows. "Make it possible to speak well of you," is a stimulating suggestion often heard. The lad may be without parents or friends, if he is manly and honorable he is made to feel that every one connected with the school—trustees, faculty and old students—is pledged to be his friend; will feel glad if he succeeds and sad if he fails.

These are some of the conditions that constrain to good conduct while the youth is in school, and make brave his heart when he steps out, often otherwise unaided, to win for himself a place as a man among men.

Another very efficient means of discipline is a daily record of credits and debits posted each night, displaying to each boy how his conduct has been and the consequences which have resulted. He has numerous ways by which he can secure credits, which are of the nature of a deposit in a bank, and may be drawn upon in time of need. He may sell them for money or for favors; they have a distinct marketable value. His "days on," as they are called, may be for failing to rise in time, a button off, boots not blacked, suspenders gone, and various other neglects of good order or conduct. A "day on" means that he must work for one hour and a half while others play. Such a record finds its way into *The Week*, which is sent free to the nearest friend of each boy, and so this one who loves the lad joins with the teacher to urge him to mend his ways. There is a power in this that never dwelt in birchen rod, and it aids in securing that self-mastery which is the best guarantee of future success. Once "on," a boy gets off by doing special jobs, or he may buy credits of his more fortunate mates. He

soon learns that great principle of ethics as well as of business, that it is not wise or safe to overdraw one's accounts.

An interesting feature of McDonogh life which has attracted the attention of some eminent writers upon social economy is the curious system of unwritten laws which has grown up among the boys. A former student, Hon. J. Hemsley Johnson, afterward a graduate of Johns Hopkins, wrote a pamphlet upon this subject which was published in the University Series and has since been republished. The title is "Rudimentary Society Among Boys." The monograph is still in considerable demand. It is designed to shed some light upon the famous saying of Herbert Spencer, that the education of the child must accord both in mode and arrangement with the education of mankind as considered historically; in other words, the genesis of knowledge in the individual must follow the same course as the genesis of knowledge in the race. It is certainly an interesting fact that there has grown up at McDonogh among boys a system of laws which are strictly observed, covering questions of land control and other rights of quite a varied and complex character.

For example, territory in the woods has been let and sublet for years for the setting of rabbit traps. Each succeeding generation has bought out the claims of those who went away. A boy's name placed near a bird's nest or a squirrel's hole protects it sacredly. There is a great number of black walnut trees on the place, and it was finally decided by the boys that they would ask for a walnut day, which request was granted. Now, all wait until walnuts are ripe; and when the day arrives, after breakfast, they stand in line and at the word, "Go," run for

the trees, some of them perhaps a mile distant. The one who reaches a tree first, climbs it, and shakes down a quantity of nuts ; he may then go away, to return at his leisure and gather the rest. It would be considered a most dishonorable act, not to be tolerated, should anyone else remove the nuts. Many other customs have thus obtained the force of legal enactments. The discussions on these questions among the boys are often conducted with much ability, and suggest, after a fashion, the primitive debates in the Witenagemote of our Saxon ancestors.

These constitute a few features of the picturesque personality of this school.

This, in brief, is the story of a little community in which, under extremely favorable conditions, an effort has been made to unite the frankness, freshness, and beauty of youth with the sober, orderly and disciplinary requirements of sound educational methods.

The best proof of the success of the enterprise is found in the fact that the graduates of McDonogh are giving a good account of themselves amid the activities of life. There is reason to believe that many of them remember that wise saying of John McDonogh, which is placed in a conspicuous position upon the walls of the institution: "The conclusion at which I have arrived is, that without temperance there is no health, without virtue no order, without religion no happiness, and the sum of our being is to live wisely, soberly, and righteously."